

[Print Page](#)

Adoption Day: Niles family adopts four more children

By JOHN EBY / Cassopolis Vigilant  
*Wednesday, November 30, 2005 11:27 AM EST*

CASSOPOLIS - Faith and Mike Cameron, both 45, always talked about taking a cruise for their 25th wedding anniversary.

Instead, they piled their burgeoning second family into a camper and traveled to Brown County, Ind.

The Niles couple, who met in a church youth group at 17, already raised three children before becoming foster parents 2 1/2 years ago.

They have adopted four children, with plans to finalize adoptions of two other foster children in their care.

In all, the Cameron household contains six youngsters 9 or younger.

They are finding their second ride on the parenting merry-go-round as satisfying - if not more so - than the first, they said while attending Cass County's program for the third annual Michigan Adoption Day sponsored by the state Department of Human Services (DHS) and the state Supreme Court.

The Camerons witnessed two adoptions before Judge Susan L. Dobrich, who presides over Circuit Court Family Division, one of a preschool girl in a frilly pink dress to a Decatur family, reuniting her with an older half-sister.

"We try to keep siblings together," said Tamela Phillips, Cass County DHS adoption specialist.

She has been the caseworker on three of the Camerons four adoptions.

"We've had 74 adoptions this year," Dobrich said. "That's more than one a week. If every county did as many as we did, that would be almost 6,000" permanent homes.

Cass County DHS Director Chris Kadulski estimated that statewide 270 children would be adopted in 40 counties.

That number has increased from 25 the former prosecutor's first year on the bench a decade ago.

"We like to come every year," Faith said. "It helps our kids know how important this is for those who have been through it, and it helps the others know it's coming for them. We'll be able to finalize on them soon. We actually finalized three (in 2005) at different times."

Nicole is 8; Tara is 3 1/2; Meredith is 23 months old; and Thomas is 18 months old.

"I think it actually helped us that we knew what we were getting into," Faith said. "We've been there. We've been through nasty teen years. We've been through sickness and everything else. We kind of changed our lifestyles to just suit the kids. This is short-term, it doesn't last forever. We dropped some commitments. Everything we do, we do as a family and that just works for us. One of our biggest changes was buying a 15-passenger van. That's the biggest challenge - learning to back that van up into parking spaces.

"The first daughter we adopted was 4," Faith said. "We thought, 'I think we can do this,' and we weren't done being parents. We took her in, then it seemed a shame to have a 4-year-old without other kids. 'We ought to get into foster care.' Then, as the kids were available and we thought we loved them, we couldn't imagine life without them, so we might as well keep them. No, there was no plan at all. I think basically we'll adopt as many as the state of Michigan will allow. I think there's a cap at eight children. Two more? I don't know. We may not have others. We've taken it as the Lord brings them, loving them and keeping them. If not, we'll love them and let them go to where they need to go. Whatever happens, happens."

The Cameron's grown children are ages 24, 22 and 20. They also have a grandson.

"We kind of fight" the perception that they are grandparents raising children when they have a grandson, too. "A lot of times people assume we are their grandparents," Faith said, "and we don't want them to feel like they don't have parents. They have grandparents and parents, and we're definitely the parents.

"Actually, it's been a great fit for us. We don't feel like we're doing anything great. We love them, they're a part of us and we can't imagine letting them go," she said. "When we got into the foster system we thought it would just be playmates for Nicole. We have a huge extended family, but not a lot of kids that age, so the family was all for it: 'You can't get rid of them. Why would you get rid of them?' Two of my kids live in town and they have been very supportive. One lives in Alabama. They are respite workers and watch the kids. My older daughter cleans my house. My mother does my laundry. I have a lot of really supportive people. There's no way I could do it all by myself."

"I want to give them the permanency they don't have," Faith said. "A lot of them have been in the system for so long, it takes them a while to realize this is forever, but it's a good challenge. They need someone to feel like, 'No matter what you put me through, buddy, you're here. You're mine.' They thrive with that. They just want to be loved."

Mike coaches Optimist soccer, which is a new experience for him.

"I'm not very good at it," he confessed, "but I'm trying."

The 9-year-old foster son (the foster daughter is 6) is starting to play basketball.

"It's better" the second time around, he said. "You're not as high-strung. We pick our battles and we're a little more relaxed, I think," said the salesman for Express Press.

Energizing him is the "fulfillment we get from knowing we're taking care of children. That's what it's about. All the rest of the stuff is necessary, but it's not front-and-center anymore," Mike said of the reordering of his priorities.

"I think we're doing it for the right reasons," though it took him longer to come around to the idea than his wife, he admits.

"That's the kind of stuff that keeps you moving and going," Faith said. "You don't think about cruises, you think about how many people can you put in a hotel with a pool for a vacation."

"The neatest thing for us" is their support system, she said.

"We have phenomenal friends through our church. When you take six kids to Wal-Mart" - she chooses her words carefully - "people notice you. But it doesn't feel like a huge undertaking. It's just our life. I'm just thankful they're not in wheelchairs. That would be too much for me. We live in an old house" her grandfather built to raise seven children.

"They share rooms, they share toys, they share everything but beds. They all have their own beds and dressers," Faith said. "There's the fulfillment you get from being a parent, then there's also the fulfillment you get from knowing you're meeting a need in the community. Also, we're back into the school system again. You have another voice in the community. We're involved in things again that we had kind of gotten out of because our kids were grown. To me, that's a great thing. It's busy, but I like it."